

The Visitor

Devoted to the Interests of Agricultural Education in Minnesota Schools

Vol. LVI

October, 1969

No. 4

Agricultural Education and Rural Development in Viet Nam

by

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Any group of United States technicians working overseas will include a number who have taught Vocational Agriculture. The training and experience of a teacher of agriculture going into a rural community to develop and carry out a program is the type of experience needed in foreign assignments. Recruiters recognize this and consider this experience an asset, whether the foreign assignment is head of a United States Mission, specialist, or Agricultural Education Advisor.

This report describes the National Training Center (NTC) for Revolutionary Development and its program in rural development. Attention is given in this report to the agriculture phase of the effort. The author, as an advisor from the United States Agency for International Development, in his final report of three years as Provincial Agricultural Advisor to Go Cong Province, Agricultural Advisor to the National Training Center and Chief of the Rural Development Branch, describes his assignment at the National Training Center for Revolutionary Development.

History

Tradition states that the Vietnamese originated in the Valley of the Yellow River in North China. After gaining independence from China in the 16th century, the Vietnamese maintained their freedom until the 19th century when the French established control over all Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia which was administered as Indo China. In 1940, Japanese troops moved into Northern Vietnam as their first stop in the conquest of Southeast Asia; moving to South Vietnam the following year where they remained until the surrender to the Allied powers in 1945.

In August, 1945, a Communist led uprising broke out and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was proclaimed, with Veteran Com-

munist Ho Chi Minh as its leader. A prolonged three-way struggle ensued among the Vietnamese Communists, the French, and the Vietnamese Nationalists led by Emperor Boa Dai. The French attempted to re-establish their control; the Nationalists chose to fight militarily with the French against the Communists, but wished neither French nor Communist domination. In April, 1954, a conference at Geneva involving the parties interested in peace in Southeast Asia provided a provisional division of Vietnam approximately at the 17th parallel and set up an international control commission.

In the ensuing nine years, Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam was able to consolidate his political position, eliminate private armies of religious sects, and with substantial American military and economic aid, built a national army and administration.

The Communists in North Vietnam, having consolidated his political position, eliminate private armies of religious sects, and with South Vietnam with the aim of reuniting the country under Communist auspices. By 1963, the Communists had made significant progress in building a subversive apparatus in South Vietnam, called the "National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam" and had recruited formidable guerrilla units.

Religious unrest broke out in Central Vietnam and on November 1, 1963, the Diem Government was overthrown by a military uprising in the course of which, Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu were killed. After approximately a year of civilian and military control, Air Vice Marshall Nguyen Cao Ky became Prime Minister. A national election held September 3, 1968, elected, Nguyen Van Thieu as President and Nguyen Cao Ky as Vice President.¹

1.] *Background Notes South Vietnam - Dept. of State Bulletin 7933, 1965*

Revolutionary Development

Revolutionary Development is the name given to the joint Vietnamese and American effort to provide village residents with security against Viet Cong attacks; to restore effective government authority; to initiate political, economic and social developments, and to gain the willing support of the people toward these goals. It is being implemented by teams of Vietnamese trained in a variety of skills, living with the villagers and helping them get organized to carry out government of Vietnam sponsored programs. The 30-man Revolutionary Development team is broken down into one six-man control element and three eightman work elements who work under the direction of the village chief to assist the village authorities in identifying the Viet Cong infrastructures; organizing the people's self defense force; organizing the people to participate in the village self-development programs and, in those areas that have not yet held elections, organizing village and hamlet elections.

The National Training Center located at Vung Tau, 25 miles south of Saigon and in the Mekong Delta Region, was organized by the Ministry of Revolutionary Development for training Revolutionary Development Cadre. (The definition of cadre is "a single individual") The center (1200 acres) consists of two camps, Lom Som and Chi-Linh. The camps are divided into 10 training battalions. These training battalions represent hamlets which are composed of six companies (approximately 100 cadre each) representing a clan. Each clan constitutes a training unit and has an open air classroom where lectures are given. The students are divided into units of five which represent the members of a family. These five construct their own house and live together. At any given time there will be 8,000 - 12,000 cadre in training. The center is under the command of Lt. Colonel Nguyen Be' and a Vietnamese staff of 1,000.



The general objectives of the six USAID advisors assigned to the National Training Center were to assist the Vietnamese staff to

upgrade the training in the Rural Development specialties of Agriculture, Education, Health, Land Reform, Cooperatives, Public Works, and Village Administration.

Specific Objectives

1. Assistance in the development and modification of curriculum course content and instructional materials.
2. Assistance in the development and modification of teaching methods, practices and techniques.
3. Assistance in the development and modification of teaching aids, demonstration and modern equipment.
4. Assistance in the development of in service and retraining courses.
5. Assistance in the selection and development of training programs for participants directly related to this project.
6. Assistance in the development of a six-year program which would enable technically qualified cadre for provincial services upon completion of their cadre obligation.

From the beginning, specialist training at the National Training Center was done mainly by lectures. Lesson plans were prepared by senior instructors or by elements of the Ministry of Revolutionary Development (MORD) in Saigon and given to instructors to repeat verbatim. Lectures were given in the barracks with students sitting on the floor listening to the instructors.

Under the leadership of Colonel Be', the instruction was shifted from the barracks to the battalion training areas. Each battalion cleared its own training area and constructed its own building from trees, vines, grass and other indigenous materials found at the camp. These battalion training areas represent hamlets. In this simulated hamlet, the students dug their own wells, built sanitary privies, cleared the underbrush, developed vegetable gardens and orchards of coconut and mango trees. Students lived in the hamlet and received practical training which helped prepare them for their assignment as members of the Revolutionary Development Team.

Training in Agriculture

In order to move agricultural instruction from pure academic lectures to a more practical nature, and to provide a model for similar work in the training battalion areas, a demonstration area was developed at which students and instructors could observe approved methods and actually participate in growing crops, raising livestock, handling machinery, constructing

projects and learning handicraft.

To develop a course of study for the cadre, a survey was made of 40 Rural Development Teams that had been working in the hamlets. A questionnaire was prepared to find out (1) what were the most important agricultural jobs the cadre were required to perform? (2) what were the important questions the farmer asked the cadre? and (3) did the cadre feel they needed more training? If the cadre indicated more training was needed, they were asked to indicate whether training should be given at the National Training Center, in the Province or re-training courses at the NTC.

From this information, a training program that would make the best use of the cadre's time at the NTC was developed as well as a provincial in-service training program; all designed to prepare the cadre for his immediate assignment on the Rural Development Team and give him something to work toward as a middle level Agricultural worker when his six years obligation to the Revolutionary Development program had been completed.

Special effort was given to the development of training aids and demonstrations. Students and instructors provided the manpower and completed such projects as: a provincial agriculture building with offices for chiefs of agriculture, fisheries, crops, cooperatives, animal husbandry, model farmstead, conference hall, farm shops and machinery storage, three types of pigsties, methane gas generator using pig manure, duck pens, chicken coops, cattle barns, fish ponds, and water pump demonstrations.

Because most of the cadre are small town boys with no experience with the functions of a province, a simulated province at Chi Linh Camp was created. United States and Vietnamese technicians carried out the role of province chief and the provincial United States Advisor. The same forms and procedures were necessary for cadre to obtain material or services as they would be in a province. The provincial agriculture building was the center for teacher training for 65 teachers with responsibilities in agriculture and also served as the provincial extension service.

Research about the country was helpful in determining a course of study and gaining an understanding of Vietnam.

The Republic of Vietnam is a narrow strip of high hills, swamps, and rice land that runs along the South China Sea. It is slightly larger than Florida. The Kingdom of Cambodia and Laos lie to the West; to the North, across the 17th parallel of latitude, lies the Communist controlled zone of North Vietnam.

Topographically, South Vietnam is divided

into four regions and has an estimated population of 17 million. The lower third of the country is dominated by the estuary of the Mekong River system which gives the country a low, flat and marshy appearance. The soil is rich and this region is the most productive agricultural area in the country. The eastern provinces are more varied than the Delta and include considerable areas of low-lying tropical rain forests. Central Vietnam is divided into a narrow coastal strip.

The highest temperature ever recorded in Saigon has been only 104 degrees whereas the temperature seldom goes below 80 degrees. In Saigon, the annual precipitation amounts to 78 inches of which 67 inches fall during the six-month period from May to October. Over five-sixths of South Vietnam has a cover of natural vegetation.

The average farm size is from five to six acres, broken into fields of less than one acre and surrounded by dikes for growing rice. The farming is a family operation with members participating in the planting, cultivating, and harvesting. The farming is largely hand labor, but small garden size tractors are being purchased cooperatively. Larger machinery is being used to some extent in the Delta. Most families will have father and sons in the South Vietnamese Army (or Viet Cong), leaving the old men, women and children to remain and carry on their farming occupation.

In the rural areas houses of most every description can be found; but generally they are of bamboo and covered with palm leaves. Occasionally one can find tin roofs, but seldom anything other than tamped earth floors. Animals are given excellent care by the Vietnamese. In Bac Lieu Province the author observed that pigs were given the run of the village and the homes. Those not running loose were staked out using a halter arrangement with holes punched in the ears of the pig. Those kept in houses (observed in Saigon as well as outlying provinces) occupied one room in the back of the house and sanitation was such that odors were not offensive.

Transportation is largely by three-wheeled motor scooters, old buses and walking. The motor bike has great popularity and one will be seen occasionally in rural homes. It will represent the work of a daughter or a son who has gone to the city to obtain additional work and returned to the farm for a visit.

Literacy training is being provided for the older people, but education is compulsory through the fifth grade for the young people. Agriculture education is provided in special agriculture schools located in strategic locations

to meet the needs in this field. A goal of the Ministry of Education is to establish an agriculture school in each of the 44 provinces.

Parents consider special training in agriculture to be as advantageous as engineering, medicine and more so than law. Twelve special agriculture schools have been set up to accommodate the Montagnard Tribes. These tribes have their own dialect and choose to take training from their own people.

Evaluation trips to visit the Rural Development Teams in the field were a regular part of the United States Advisor's assignment, and served to keep him informed of current training needs. The trip, made with a Vietnamese counterpart, carried a degree of risk and for one nine-month period it was discontinued because of enemy actions. The morale of the Revolutionary Development Team members depended largely on the team leader who could make or break the team effort.

The military training of the teams helped defeat most small action encounters with the Viet Cong; however, the loss ratio of the Revolutionary Development Teams killed and wounded exceeds that of the Vietnamese Army. To spend a night with the team was enough to understand the stresses and strains of the cadre. Shells from United States and Vietnamese artillery streaked over the hamlet all night and the hard floors without padding were disagreeable for sleeping. The team walked regular shifts of guard duty for protection. Travel by USAID advisors of any distance is by one and two motor planes which operate on a well organized airline (Air America). Before traveling overland it is necessary to obtain security clearance to avoid enemy action or land mines. Travel by helicopter is made where it is unsafe to travel between United States or Vietnamese cities or camps. The flight plan calls for a vertical take off to an altitude where small arm fire is less hazardous; a forward movement until the location is found, then a rapid descent.

Vietnamese instructors who accompanied United States Advisors were of great assistance in visiting the teams. Their ability to speak English and their interest in the success of the Revolutionary Development program was a credit to these dedicated men. Chon Duon was a graduate of the Agricultural School at Bac Lao and assigned to the National Training Center. He learned English through individual study and his association with the USAID Advisors. In his 22 years, Chon Duon has never known anything but war. His father brought the family from North Vietnam in 1955 to make a new life in the South. His father and

brother were war casualties. He now provides for his mother and sister who moved to Saigon for protection from the Viet Cong. Chon Duon's plans for marriage are being postponed until the war ends, even though his mother has selected and arranged for his future bride.

Evaluation

1. During 1969, there has been a rapid evolution of the role and concepts of the employment of the Revolutionary Development Cadre. The size of the deployed group was reduced from 59 to 30 cadre, and the paramilitary responsibilities formerly held by the 59-man group has been largely delegated to the popular forces, with the expansion of the village Administration Committee to include technical specialists assigned by the Government of Vietnam to each village.
2. As a result of the mobilization which has taken most young men of 17 years or older, disorganization of the ministries at the local level, manpower shortages are acute in some areas. The R. D. Cadre can supplement personnel shortages to support the ministries and in turn learn skills which can be useful in peace time activities.
3. Demonstration facilities: As programmed, the National Training Center now has practical laboratories, or demonstrations in agriculture and farm mechanics which can be used to provide top quality training. These units have provided developmental experience for the committee assigned to each section; a basis for guided work experience for 55,000 different cadre, and as a teaching tool for both students and instructors.
4. Training Activities: More and better training materials were developed than were used, because of changing training policies. The National Training Center now has complete lesson plans for a general basic course, a course outline for instructor training, lesson plans for advanced training of cadre, and a course outline for provincial in-service training.
5. In terms of the present training program now being conducted at the National Training Center, the training facilities and methods now available are adequate in agriculture, farm mechanics, and construction activities. The committees organized to guide these activities are competent to guide the training.

United States Advisors were phased out of the Rural Development Program at the National Training Center on June 1, 1969, having completed their assignment.